

Maundy Thursday - 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. 24.3.2016

Celebrating the Lord's Supper

²³ For this is what the Lord himself said, and I pass it on to you just as I received it. On the night when he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took a loaf of bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵ In the same way, he took the cup of wine after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant between God and you, sealed by the shedding of my blood. Do this in remembrance of me as often as you drink it."

²⁶ For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord's death until he comes again.

²⁷ So if anyone eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord unworthily, that person is guilty of sinning against the body and the blood of the Lord. ²⁸ That is why you should examine yourself before eating the bread and drinking from the cup. ²⁹ For if you eat the bread or drink the cup unworthily, not honouring the body of Christ, you are eating and drinking God's judgment upon yourself.

What is Paul getting at here, when he 'passes on what the Lord himself said, just as he received it'? At first it might seem as if this is simply a teaching on Communion. But a look at the context soon shows us that what Paul is getting at here, is not about whether people believed in the real presence of Christ at communion.

Just a quick refresher: In the verses leading up to the 'Words of Institution' of Communion, Paul addresses a problem around the 'communal meal'. It had in fact become a clique meal - where the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' seem to have kept separate. The 'haves' had the food and wine, and the 'have-nots' were made to watch as this food and wine was enjoyed.

Questions of social grouping have since the beginning plagued the church. We happily acknowledge that in Christ we are all one - only it seems that some are more equal than others. For Paul this issue highlights something which is more than just making class distinctions.

So, in this very first rendering in print of the words we use when instituting Holy Communion, it is not just a dry theological text. It highlights that

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can't simply be viewed in isolation from our lives and relationships.

Communion fellowship is not just a matter of theory to be discussed by theologians - it is to be reflected by our lives.

Paul speaks here about that which the Lord instituted - this wonderful gift our Lord left us, his church: something we are to keep on doing in his remembrance. As we hear and read of that night on which Jesus first spoke these words, we can't do so without remembering how he demonstrated what it means to belong to him, when he washed the feet of his disciples, and said that by this washing they became part of him. Now we, who belong together, are to be ready to perform even the lowliest service for one another.

Being one as we celebrate communion - that is therefore not simply a theoretical question. The question of unity lies in the great commandment of Christ - loving God above all else, and loving our 'neighbour' as we love ourselves.

It is significant that the words of instituting the Lord's supper begin: **On the night when he was betrayed**, - that is a reminder of the time when this happened. But it may also highlight the fact, that there is a danger of betraying him.

We know of the betrayal of Judas - of Peter's denial that he even knows Christ. But betraying Jesus may also take place, when we the unity of the church is only a theory, and not something we practise. Betraying Jesus may be: living a self-satisfied life, that we have got all the theoretical aspects of faith right, but neglecting the practise of faith.

When we celebrate the Lord's Supper we receive fellowship - fellowship with the Lord, and fellowship amongst ourselves. Christ binds us together in by his gift of unity, which we on our own simply can't achieve.

As we receive his life-giving presence, we join with the church through all the centuries in an act of proclamation: **For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord's death until he comes again.**

We announce what Jesus did, when we don't just celebrate communion for our own welfare - as we eat and drink his body and blood, he brings us together with people he has joined us with. And we proclaim: we all are one in him,

while at the same time we receive his power to live in this unity.

Our calling as people of Christ is to live the fellowship we have received as we commune together. The challenge for us is to recognise that our fellowship is more than a theory - that it calls for us to see others, to recognise the need somebody may have for companionship. Our calling is to live by the new commandment of our Lord: **"Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."** (John 13:34-35)

We live in a time where we are surrounded by many people, and yet people seem to be lonelier than ever before. We seem to be aware of the need to care for people of different culture and race - but sometimes those who feel lonely may be those who are like us in many regards, and yet feel that nobody cares for / about them.

The Lord's Supper - wonderful mystery of Christ being here. We are filled with wonder and awe at what he does so that we may live with him, and so that we may truly live a life in the communion of all his saints.

But then it is about living with all his saints: We are to practise fellowship - not because we choose it, but because he has chosen us.

As we confess our faith together we acknowledge that we are all one in him, and he makes us one with himself as we join to say together the words of the Nicene Creed:

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made; who for us and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary and was made man; and was crucified also for us, under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was

buried. And the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures and ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father. And he will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead, whose kingdom will have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets.

And I believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church, I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins, and I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.